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GOVT SET TO ROLL OUT ANNUAL FASTAG PASSES FOR PVT VEHICLES FROM AUG 15

Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways of India, Nitin Gadkari, on Wednesday said the move is aimed at making highway travel hassle-free

200 TRIPS ON NATIONAL HIGHWAYS FOR ₹3,000

The pass will be valid for one year from the date of activation, or 200 trips, whichever comes first. Users may re-purchase the pass once the 200-trip limit is exhausted, even if the one-year validity period has not yet ended. The pass—valid only at NHAI-operated toll plazas—is designed exclusively for non-commercial private vehicles such as cars, jeeps & vans

LESS CONGESTION, DISPUTES AT TOLL PLAZAS

- Gadkari said the annual pass will reduce wait time, ease congestion, and minimise disputes at toll plazas
- The annual pass can be activated on existing FASTag
- Using annual passes will not be mandatory; users can continue to pass toll plazas using their existing electronic toll collection tags

₹15

WILL BE THE AVERAGE COST OF CROSSING A TOLL PLAZA FOR ANNUAL PASS HOLDERS

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

Govt shifts Cabinet meet from Nandi Hills to Soudha

DEVARAJ B HIREHALLI & V VELAYUDHAM
@ Bengaluru, Chikkaballapura

IT is business as usual. There is no Cabinet meeting at the Nandi Hills and it will be held instead at Vidhana Soudha.

According to sources, the government decided to shift the Cabinet meeting, fearing the ire of mango growers, as farmers were planning to protest at the Nandi Hills during the cabinet meeting. The farmers had the backing of the JD(S).

The threat of protest by mango growers, and the long list by Shaswatha Neeravari Horata Samithi for the speedy implementation of irrigation projects for the region, forced the government to shift the Cabinet meeting, sources said. The protestors had a plan to dump damaged mangoes on main roads connecting the Nandi Hills through Chikkaballapura from Bengaluru, to create an obstacle to the vehicles of the Chief Minister and ministers. The state intelligence alerted the CM in this regard, sources added.

However, the CMO maintained that the Cabinet meeting was shifted to Vidhana Soudha due to 'technical reasons' as the Finance Department had not given clearance to certain projects meant for the region.

The CM had a plan to cover the subjects of the entire Bengaluru revenue division, including the districts of Bengaluru Urban, Rural, Ramanagara, Shivamogga, Davanager, and Tumakuru. Because of a lack of subjects (as there were only 19), and Bengaluru Division not being covered entirely, the Cabinet was shifted to Vidhana Soudha, they said. P4

CM Siddaramaiah takes part in an event on Palace Grounds in Bengaluru on Wednesday | NAGARAJA GADEKAL

Kashmiri students wait to board a flight to India under an evacuation operation facilitated by Govt of India, at Yerevan Int'l Airport in Armenia on Wednesday | PTI

Operation Sindhu starts, first evacuation flight to land in New Delhi today

JAYANTH JACOB, FAYAZ WANI & NAMITA BAJPAI
@ New Delhi / Srinagar / Lucknow

INDIA has launched Operation Sindhu to evacuate its nationals from conflict-torn Iran, which has come under heavy Israeli aerial bombardment. The first evacuation flight is expected to land in New Delhi on Thursday.

A total of 110 Indian students boarded a special flight from Yerevan in Armenia on Wednesday. The flight is scheduled to land in New Delhi around 2:00 am on Thursday. Around 90 of these students are from Jammu and Kashmir. There are around 1,300 J&K students in Iran.

The Iranian Embassy in Delhi said five Indian students were injured during a strike on a medical students' dormitory on Keshavarz Street in Tehran on Sunday. Sources said the students were safely evacuated and nobody sustained any serious injury.

"My ward is studying MBBS in Sheraz University. I am worried about his safety, especially after hearing news that a hostel came under Isreali strike," said Srinagar resident Shabir Ahmed.

Nasir Khuehami, national convenor of J&K Students Association, said 250 more students have been shifted to safer location of Qom. They will be evacuated to Armenia and then airlifted to Delhi.

Meanwhile, the families of those working in Israel are equally worried. Workers from around 70 families from Barabanki, Lucknow and other districts are employed in various factories in Israel.

Ram Singh, a welder from Malihabad, Lucknow, shared his experiences with his family through a video call, explaining that mobile alerts come 10 minutes before a missile attack, followed by loud sirens five minutes ahead.

"The moment the siren sounds, there's panic all around. Everyone runs for the bunkers," he told his family.

'Iran will not surrender'

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday rejected US President Donald Trump's ultimatum to surrender. "Wise individuals who know Iran, its people, and its history never speak to this nation with the language of threats," he said

Modi calls out Trump on mediation. Don reiterates role in defusing clash

Prime minister says India has always been against third-party mediation on Kashmir issue

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

SENDING a clear and firm message to Washington, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told US President Donald Trump that India has never accepted—and will never accept—third-party mediation on the Kashmir issue. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said Modi made it unequivocally clear during their 35-minute phone call on Tuesday.

The call — their second direct engagement since the April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam — came against the backdrop of Operation Sindoor.

Misri said "India's response was measured, precise, and limited to terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan occupied Kashmir," underscoring New Delhi's commitment to strategic restraint without compromising on national security.

The conversation also sought to clarify India's position on recent claims by President Trump, who had repeatedly talked about playing a role in brokering a ceasefire between India and Pakistan.

Modi directly addressed this, saying there were "no discussions on a trade deal between India and the US or about a mediation between India and Pakistan" at any point during the four days of military confrontation. The ceasefire talks, he said, were conducted exclusively between India and Pakistan, without external involvement.

President Trump suggested a stopover meeting in the US during Modi's return from Canada, but the prime minister declined due to prior commitments. Both agreed to find another opportunity for an in-person meeting soon.

Narendra Modi Donald Trump

Hours later, Trump reiterated that he intervened to prevent a military conflict between India and Pakistan in May after the Pahalgam terror attack.

Speaking to reporters at the White House, he described Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as "a fantastic man" and expressed optimism about a forthcoming trade deal between the US and India.

"Well, I stopped the war... I love Pakistan. I think Modi is a fantastic man. I spoke to him last night. We're going to make a trade deal with Modi of India. But I stopped the war between Pakistan and India," President Trump said.

Addressing speculation around a potential White House meeting with Pakistan Army Chief General Asim Munir, Trump credited Munir with playing a key role in de-escalating the crisis.

"This man was extremely influential in stopping it from the Pakistan side," Trump said, referring to Munir. "Modi, from the India side, and others — they were going at it, and they're both nuclear countries. I got it stopped."

Trump also questioned media coverage of his claims, stating, "I don't think I had one story. Did I have one story written..."

India and Canada reset ties, agree to reinstate envoys

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

IN a big step towards mending strained ties, India and Canada have agreed to reinstate High Commissioners in each other's capitals and restart stalled trade negotiations, following a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney on the sidelines of the G7 Summit early on Wednesday.

Modi and Carney agreed to take steps to restore stability to the relationship with the return of top diplomats marking the first formal gesture of renewed engagement. "Diplomatic steps will follow in due course," said Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri.

The meeting set in motion the resumption of dialogues on trade, connectivity, and public engagement. Trade talks, previously paused, will also be revived, with both leaders instructing their officials to restart negotiations soon.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Canadian PM Mark Carney on the sidelines of G7 Summit at Kananaskis, Canada | PTI

Collaboration on global challenges and emerging technologies formed a key part of the discussion, with both sides agreeing to deepen cooperation in clean energy, AI, digital infrastructure, food security, and critical minerals.

After the meeting, PM Modi said, "Had an excellent meeting with Prime Minister Mark Carney. Complimented him and the Canadian Government for successfully hosting the G7 Summit. India and Canada are connected by a strong belief in democracy, freedom and rule of law. PM Carney and I look forward to working closely to add momentum to the India-Canada friendship. Areas like trade, energy, space, clean energy, critical minerals, fertilisers and more offer immense potential in this regard."

This marks Prime Minister Modi's first visit to Canada since the diplomatic fallout following allegations of Indian involvement in the killing of pro-Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. The controversy triggered diplomatic expulsions and the suspension of key dialogues.

A statement from Carney's office reaffirmed the importance of Canada-India ties "based on mutual respect, the rule of law, and a commitment to the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity".

Will ensure safe release of 'Thug Life': K'taka to SC

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY
@ New Delhi

THE Karnataka government on Wednesday, filed a detailed affidavit in the Supreme Court on Wednesday and said that if actor Kamal Haasan's movie, 'Thug Life', is released in the state, then it would take all the necessary steps to maintain law and order, and provide security to all the citizens concerned and other stakeholders.

The Karnataka government on Wednesday filed the affidavit in SC after complying with the court's Tuesday's order, which asked it to file the same in a day. "In the event the producers of the film decide to release the movie in Karnataka, the State Government is duty bound and will give protection and security for such release and for the people connected therewith, including the cast, director, producers, the exhibitors, and the audience," stated the affidavit of Karnataka government.

SC was hearing a PIL filed by Bengaluru resident M Mahesh Reddy. The case is expected to be heard on Thursday by a two-judge vacation bench. Responding to the PIL, the Karnataka government — in its three-page written reply filed in the top court — said that the Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce has issued a letter on May 30, 2025 to the lead actor of the movie expressing its displeasure to certain statements made by him at a promotional event and has sought for his apology.

The Government also pointed out Raaj Kamal Films International, the producers of the movie, filed a writ petition before the Karnataka High Court for security for exhibition of the movie. 'Thug life' has not been, released in Karnataka following a controversy over the actor's alleged remark during the film's audio launch, where he stated that Kannada originated from Tamil.

EXPRESS READ

India-UK FTA provides stability, predictability to business: Goyal

LONDON: The India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) brings "stability and predictability" for businesses in both countries, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said on Wednesday. During a session at the India Global Forum UK-India Week, he shared his optimism around the "good marriage" agreed between both countries, which will lead to doubling bilateral trade in five years.

Swedish firm commits to ₹500 cr investment in Karnataka: Min

BENGALURU: Industries Minister MB Patil on Wednesday said Sweden's Epiroc will invest Rs 500 crore in the state in 2025, and an additional Rs 1,000 crore by 2030. Epiroc has over 500 employees in the city, contributing to 25% of the company's global R&D output. According to Patil, Epiroc's decision was one of the key outcomes of Karnataka's roadshow in Sweden.

Axiom-4 mission to now launch on June 22, says ISRO

BENGALURU: After multiple delays and rescheduling of dates, the Indian Space Research Organisation on Wednesday said the most anticipated Axiom-4 space mission to the International Space Station (ISS) will launch on June 22. Taking to 'X', ISRO announced the new date after Indian scientists held discussions with their counterparts from Poland and Hungary | P7

'Sergei Baba' dies in Ukraine war, last rites in Gokarna

SUBHASH CHANDRA NS
@ Gokarna (Uttara Kannada)

SERGEI Grablevesky was a Russian soldier. He died in the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine on April 26 but his path to salvation ran through distant Gokarna.

On Wednesday, priest Prashanth Hiregange performed the last rites of Grablevesky at Gokarna. With a picture of Grablevesky in the foreground, the priest performed Narayana Bali, a fire ceremony aimed to liberate the soul and allow it to reach its ultimate destination, and Pinda Daan, which includes offering balls of cooked rice mixed with ghee and black sesame seeds to ancestors, in keeping with Hindu customs.

As Hiregange chanted hymns, the ceremony was watched live by Grablevesky's family, friends and disciples in Russia. "We had a video conference and the rituals were telecast to his disciples in Moscow. Sergei's last rites were also performed in Pushkar and Rishikesh," said Paraneshwar Shastri, a friend of Sergei.

Grablevesky was not an ordinary soldier. He had left the Russian Army and was treading on a spiritual path. He returned to the battle only this March. It was nearly 18 years ago that Grablevesky first came to Gokarna and he immediately became besotted with Hindu culture and practices. He learnt Sanskrit and the Vedas.

For the locals in Gokarna, Grablevesky was 'Sergei Baba' and he had many followers.

"He was influenced by Indian culture, tradition and society. This is what brought him to Gokarna where he spent a lot of time. He even went to Varanasi where he stayed for sometimes," said Vinayak Shastri, a priest.

According to Parameshwar Shastri, Grablevesky used to visit Gokarna almost every year. He made friends with many locals.

"Sergei was influenced by Shaivism and used to chant holy verses so well that he used to perform Mruthyunja Rudra Yaga," said Shastri.

"One day he told his friend, Govind Nagappa Gouda, that he wanted to establish an ashram here and then set up Maya Ashram here. He had thousands of followers, particularly Russians and Ukrainians," said Shastri.

Coming, rules to mandate IST for time sovereignty

JITENDRA CHOUBEY @ New Delhi

DID you know that the Indian Standard Time (IST) we all are familiar with is derived from the Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) with an offset of +5.30 hours? It is a successor to the Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).

Years after Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a 'One Nation, One Time' pitch, the Department of Consumer Affairs, in collaboration with CSIR-NPL and ISRO, is set to notify a bunch of rules for synchronisation of all activities with IST.

It may not appear to be a big deal for the *aam aadmi*, but synchronisation would make their digital transactions more secure, add accuracy to utility billing and reduce risks of cybercrime.

Currently, Indian industries depend on the Global Positioning System (GPS) of US satellites for precise and synchronised time. The downside is it can be vulnerable to manipulation in critical sectors such as finance, telecommunications, and defence.

The upcoming notification of the Legal Metrology (IST) Rules, 2025. marks India's strategic shift towards time sovereignty, technological independence and digital resilience under the guiding vision of 'One Nation, One Time'

Govt official

For context, the time standard used for the recent four-day Operation Sindoor against Pakistan was not linked to the GPS to keep it away from the prying eyes of the enemy.

The government has now directed that all legal, commercial, and administrative activities be synchronised with IST.

The use of alternative time references will be prohibited unless it is specifically authorised.

Establishing a domestic source of time standard is critical for various sectors like telecom, railways, finance, SEBI, power, electronics, and stock exchanges, where even nanoseconds can make a significant difference.